DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 021 PS 024 732

AUTHOR	Greenman, Jim
TITLE	Best for My Baby: Low-Income Parents and the Struggle To Do the Right Thing. Facilitator's Guide.
INSTITUTION	Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association, MN.; Hennepin County Public Library, Minneapolis, MN.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	26p.; Accompanying videotape not available from EDRS.
AVAILABLE FROM	Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association, 1628 Elliot Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55404; phone: 612-341-1177 ($69; includes 30 minute VHS videotape).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Behavior; Child Development; Childhood Needs; *Child Rearing; Discipline; Family Financial Resources; Infants; Learning Processes; *Low Income; Parent Attitudes; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Education; Parent Materials; Social Support Groups; Toddlers; Videotape Recordings
IDENTIFIERS	Family Support

ABSTRACT

Noting that like all parents, low-income parents need support more than unsolicited "how-to" advice, this guide explores issues of being a good parent under less than ideal circumstances. The guide provides a framework for parenting discussion group leaders to use the "Best for My Baby" video. The guide provides a synopsis of the video, considerations for introducing the showing of the video, questions to facilitate discussion, and notes on potential problems that may arise in discussion groups. Among the issues explored are: (1) realistic expectations for children and family life; (2) guidance that teaches (developmentally appropriate discipline); (3) respect for the child as a full human being; (4) respect for what the child can do what the parents can do; and (5) available help and support. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 402 021

Best For My Baby:

Low-Income Parents and the Struggle to do the Right Thing

Facilitator's Guide

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dawn Sursely
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 02-32

PARTNER SUCCESS BY 6

A discussion guide for the ***Best For My Baby*** videotape produced by Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association and the Hennepin County Library.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Best For My Baby:

Low-Income Parents and the Struggle to do the Right Thing

Facilitator's Guide

Acknowledgements

Best For My Baby: Low-Income Parents and the Struggle to do the Right Thing was a production of the **Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association** and the **Hennepin County Public Library**

Credits

Produced and Directed by Ann Follett and Jim Greenman
Written by Jim Greenman
Edited by Ann Follet and Dave Carlson
Assistant Producers: Dave Carlson and Janice Cole Krick
Facilitator's Guide: Jim Greenman
Layout and Design: Becky Andrews, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation

Funding for this project was made possible through a grant from:

PARTNER SUCCESS BY 6
Helping all children succeed for life

© 1990, Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association,
1628 Elliot Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612/341-1177

Contents

I Introduction 1

II Synopsis of *"Best For My Baby"* 3

III Introducing and Showing *"Best For My Baby"* 8

IV Questions to Facilitate Discussion 9

V Potential Problems in Discussion Groups 14

VI A Final Note 14

VII Supplemental Information 15

I Introduction

Notes

Best For My Baby is designed as a tool for anyone working with low-income families or parents-to-be. The video may be used as a tool for parents and for training professionals, teachers, child care staff and other parent workers.

"My baby is going to have the best I can give," says every new parent. What is "best" and "how can I give it" is the subject of this 32 minute video. In the words of low-income parents, the best care, guidance and learning experiences are explored for children under three. The parents in the video are ordinary people, no more or less models than anyone else. Their stories and their insight represent the conviction that within all of us is the potential to provide the best for our babies.

A Tape for Parents

Like all parents, low-income parents need support more than unsolicited "how-to" advice. They need information and ideas, and like all of us, need respect and understanding for the real struggles involved with raising children. This tape is designed for classes and parent support groups helping parents to get off to a good start.

What makes ***Best For My Baby*** distinctive is that there is not talking down to parents, no tone of earnest helpful instruction from well-meaning enlightened professionals. It isn't easy raising children in any circumstances but with limited resources for food, housing, transportation—and often as a single parent—family life can be full of stress. "How can I give my child the best start on life" in this context is realistically explored with sensitivity, listening to parents talk about what they do when they are at their best, when things are going right. Issues touched upon are:

- Realistic expectations for children and family life.
- Guidance that teaches (developmentally appropriate discipline).
- Respect for his/her child as a full human being.
- Respect for what the child can do, and what they as parents can do.
- Help and support is available and its ok to ask for it.

Notes

Best For My Baby is designed as a tool for discussion leaders and motivated parents to explore the issues in greater depth—both a guide pointing parents in the right direction and a pep talk. The key messages a parent or pre-parent viewer receives:

- "It won't be easy, but I can be a good parent."
- "I am really important to my child. What I do counts."
- "I'll blow it—everybody does—but I won't use that as an excuse for giving up."
- "All kids can drive us crazy just doing the things that they need to do to develop."
- "Knowing that my child is a wonderful, purposeful learner will help me cope with problem behaviors."

A Tape for Professionals

Best for My Baby is also a tape to educate professionals and others to understand the perspective of low-income parents—what life in the poverty lane is like. These are ordinary people, not carefully selected for their education as models. They have all the blind spots and failings that most of us have. Their insight and eloquence illustrates the knowledge and strength that lie within all of us. Key messages for professionals and the general public:

- Good parents are heros—ordinary people who rise to the occasion.
- Parents have instincts and strengths to be tapped.
- All parents deserve respect and understanding.

II Synopsis of *"Best For My Baby"*

Notes

"Best For My Baby"—Quick Section Guide

Introduction (We All Want the Best for Our Baby)
Begin 0:00 End 1:51 Running time 1:51

Children Are Wonderful Learners (And They Can Be Very Annoying)
Begin 1:51 End 5:35 Running time 3:44

Doing The Right Thing, Or Trying To
Begin 5:35 End 7:13 Running time 1:38

Discipline and Self-Control—Theirs and Ours
Begin 7:13 End 12:49 Running time 5:36

Children Demand So Much—And We Don't Always See It Coming
Begin 12:49 End 17:23 Running time 4:34

It Ain't Easy Being Poor
Begin 17:23 End 22:33 Running time 5:10

Parents Lead Busy Lives
Begin 22:33 End 24:18 Running time 1:45

Parents Can't Make It Alone
Begin 24:18 End 27:37 Running time 3:19

Babies Don't Need the Best—They Need Our Best
Begin 27:37 End 30:00 Running time 2:23

Introduction

"I want the best for my baby!" Every parent says that—young and old, rich or poor. Then the baby is born and the struggle begins, and it is a struggle for all of us, with a lot of joy and wonderful rewards as well as pain and disappointment.

What does it mean to give your baby "the best," and how do you do it? How do you do it if you don't have much money, if you are all alone? This 32 minute video explores these issues and tells stories of some parents working hard to give their babies their best.

Notes

Children Are Wonderful Learners (and they can be very annoying)

From birth, children are wonderful learners. They work so hard to make sense of this huge world of people and things. That's what makes them so much fun. It's also what makes them so annoying at times. They push and push and push until they solve a problem or understand something, or discover what we are made of. The young baby discovering his hand, the toddler wobbling along, the sly three year olds using chairs as tools to get that hard to reach forbidden cookie are doing their jobs—learning.

How do we encourage learning? By encouraging them—giving our children our time, our interest, our acceptance, and our praise. Tina Hill let's her son Mikey know how excited she is by his learning numbers. Learning is promoted by involving our children in our lives like Monique Hill does when her son PJ helps her cook and like Linda and Walter Funmaker do when their children share their love of the outdoors. Or, by our openness to learning from our child's interests as Dana Broughton did enjoying her daughter's pleasure in being outside.

Sometimes it's hard to find the time to read with our kids, to play with them, and all parents at times have a problem being not hard of hearing, but "hard of listening." But as Melanie Garcia points out, often everything boils down to finding a relatively small amount of time with our children—but time that's really focused on them, giving them our full attention.

Doing the Right Thing, or Trying To

We all want that family life that the Cosby's and the Cleavers seem to have with no effort, but real life doesn't always work that way. The family meal seems to be a standard wish—a relaxed family time for discussion and enjoying each other. Yet as Linda and Patti relate, tired and hungry young children and tired parents rushed after work or school are often the wrong ingredients for relaxed family time. And as Lisa's example points out, it is not just that everyone's tired and hungry, but babies often have a different agenda: play and learning.

Our best is continuing to work for quality time—and keep our perspective and sense of humor when fate conspires against us.

Discipline and Self Control—Theirs and Ours

All kids at times can annoy us and drive us crazy. Its their job to push to discover limits, both their's and ours. The hardest part of trying to guide young children to self-control is remembering they are NOT little criminals

when they test us—even though that's how it feels to us. No, they are just little boys and girls struggling for self control and understanding. Knowing that helps a little, but what can parents do?

Lisa Roach uses time outs, taking care not to label her children "bad." Dana Broughton explains to her one year old "no that is not o.k." and what Deja should do—just like Dana does with older children—because children need to learn what is o.k. and why.

Sometimes when children test us it's funny. Sometimes it isn't and parents lose it. There isn't a parent alive who hasn't lost control with their child. How do parents regain control?

For Tina, it helps to think about how many children end up abused when she reaches her breaking point. Patti, like many parents, tries to remove herself, or put the children in their room until the anger passes and she can get her thoughts together. When Melanie and her child got into the all too common habit of yelling at each other, talking and coming to an agreement helped get them back on a more positive track. Explaining why she raised her voice to her children helps Linda reduce her own regrets about losing it.

Probably the single most important thing in helping children learn self-control is consistency—in what we expect of them, in how we handle conflict. That isn't always easy when you are a parent under pressure from the child to give in or when trying to work together with another parent. Paul and Monique Hill recognize how two year old PJ tries to use both Mom and Dad to get what he wants, and how hard it is to stay consistent and in control.

What's our best when we are trying to discipline our children? When we are consistent, fair, and keep ourselves together. Using time-outs to allow them and us to get it together, and explaining to kids what we expect of them and why we are angry is easier on us and them, and more effective than spanking.

Children Demand So Much— And We Don't Always See It Coming

Until the baby comes, its hard to realize how much this new little person will turn your life upside down and the huge responsibility that comes with this bundle of joy. The smiles and hugs, those we expect, but what about the other side, those hard times?

Notes

Notes

As Patti Peterson, Lisa Roach, and Tina Davis make clear, children are a lot of work, particularly for single parents. They demand so much from you—they get sick a lot, they take your sleep, and you can't put them aside because you have work, final exams or are sick yourself. If you are thinking about having children, think carefully about what it takes.

Illness can also devastate families. The reality of the huge responsibility of being a parent hit home to Dana when her baby was struck by a serious illness. She had to convince the doctor how sick her daughter Deja really was and felt compelled to stay by her side. Walter Funmaker's illness (the after effects of his exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam) has taken a large toll on his life and deeply affected his family.

It Isn't Easy Being Poor in a World Filled With Stuff

We live in a rich society, filled with images that "best for my baby" is the best that money can buy. So when you don't have money, there are special struggles and special pain. Lisa often has wondered whether she has done the right thing keeping her children when she is desperately juggling bills, feeling alone and struggling to provide for them by herself. Patti and Dana share the feelings of embarrassment and a sense of always being judged by others that often goes with being poor.

Many parents face the hard choice that Paul and Monique have had: food or medicine? Or understand the hurt that comes with not being able to take your kids to a museum, send them to camp, or buy them school books.

Children of color often are led to believe early that "the best" will never include them and they learn about racism at an early age. What Walter Funmaker tried to teach his four-year old daughter after she was called a half-breed was that racism comes from fear, and to respond in kind only diminishes yourself.

Parents Lead Busy Lives

Look around and you see parents with two jobs, school, husbands and wives passing in the night on the way to and from jobs—all for their children's future. Paul Hill cares for his son PJ while Monique does her Naval Reserve duty and when she is working nights and weekends. For single parent Lisa Roach, balancing homework, finals, young children and sleep is a constant struggle.

Parents Can't Make It Alone

Parents can't make it alone—they never really could. That's what families are for. The importance of fathers playing an active role, taking advantage of the experience of mothers and grandparents, and using other relatives and friends for support are all important. The extended family plays a particularly important role in some cultures.

Of course, family advice and support isn't always exactly what we need or want, and sometimes it isn't always enough. There is a lot of help out there from agencies like the Salvation Army, the United Way, Head Start, child care centers, and family support groups. Often, for the sake of the children, it takes swallowing illusions and pride to seek the help that is out there.

Babies Don't Need the Best—They Need Our Best

"I want the best for my baby." Babies don't need *the* best, they need *our* best—our love, our patience, our discipline, our effort, and our hope. For some parents, the best is struggling to finish school, to earn enough to keep food on the table, and to stay away from drugs or alcohol. Our best is finding time for the children, quality time that involves them in the life of the family.

When you listen to these parents you begin to understand—good parents are heroes—ordinary people who rise to the occasion. And they do it because they believe strongly that their children deserve it.

Notes

Notes

III Introducing and Showing *"Best For My Baby"*

Considerations

■ *Adequate Time*

Best For My Baby has a running time of 32 minutes. Assuming five to ten minutes of introduction, a 60-minute session allows for reaction to the video. A 90-minute to 2-hour time block allows for more in-depth discussion.

It is difficult to divide ***Best For My Baby*** into two parts for split showings because the messages in each segment build off earlier segments and the power of the video comes from understanding the overall perspectives of the parents.

Best For My Baby does lend itself to returning to segments as a springboard for discussion. For example, use ***Best For My Baby*** in an initial meeting and return to the video's first segments when discussing discipline at a later meeting.

■ *Comfortable Setting*

The more comfortable and relaxed the setting, the more likely good discussion will occur. For small groups sitting at or around tables or on couches is preferable to sitting in a circle of chairs. For larger groups, sitting at tables is less formal than theater style seating in chairs. The presence of coffee or other refreshments relaxes the atmosphere.

■ *At Ease with Others in the Group*

Best For My Baby brings out very personal issues. The more relaxed individuals are with each other the better the discussion. Using name tags, if necessary, and knowing a little bit about each other such as children, job or school, helps the discussion. Passing around pictures of children is a good ice breaker.

■ *Prepared Facilitator*

Familiarity with this guide will help a facilitator conduct smooth discussions. Knowing what questions and concerns are likely to arise in advance can allow a facilitator to start the discussion or keep it going.

When the facilitator has information about parenting resources, more assistance is accomplished.

IV Questions to Facilitate Discussion

Notes

1. General Reactions

- "How did you feel when you were watching the video?"
- "Were these people that you could relate to?"
- "Were there any surprises?"
- "Were there individuals you particularly liked?"

For professionals or general public:

- "How did these parents square with our typical views of low-income parents?"
- "If we respect parent strengths, are there ways we can offer more support for parents? What can we do differently?"
- "Child-saving"—the desire to save a child from his/her supposedly inadequate parents is an occupational hazard of educators and the helping professions. How can we use what we saw on screen to reduce that disposition?

2. Section-by-Section Questions and Key Messages to Respond to:

■ *Children Are Wonderful Learners (and they can be very annoying)*

Key Messages

✔ Children are naturally wonderful learners
✔ They push to explore and solve problems which can result in annoying behavior
✔ We encourage learning by giving them our time, our interest, trying to understand their behavior, and praising their accomplishments
✔ We need to listen to our children, talk to them, and read to them

Facilitator's Questions

- "We heard about Patti's children going to a lot of trouble to get the forbidden cookie and Paul's baby discovering his hand, what do your kids do that illustrates their drive to learn?"

- "What negative behavior results from this drive?" (e.g., not taking "no" for an answer to test your limits, exploring something or somewhere that they are not supposed to)

- "When are you most proud of their ability to learn?"

Notes

- "What could you do more of to promote their learning?" (e.g., more of your time, interest, activities, praise)

- Are there different expectations of children in different cultures, or different beliefs about how children learn?

For professionals or general public:
- "How can we work off the strong desires that parents have for their children to learn?"
- "How can we help parents find that time for their kids?"

Likely Questions from the Group
- "Is a small amount of 'quality' time enough?"

Possible Response
- "Quality time is important. When Melanie talks about 'just' 15 minutes, she means 15 minutes where a child has your undivided attention and interest in what he or she is interested in. Children need that. But they also need ample amounts of 'hanging around' time with parents and 'helping' time, where parents and children are working together. Today's parents are busy. Good child care supports working and student families. Yet, parents still need to find time for their children and to make what time they have as positive as possible."

- "Quality time can be spent 'working' together—running errands, folding laundry, setting the table—or playing games, reading stories, or the time spent easing into and out of sleep."

■ *Doing the Right Thing, or Trying To*

Key Messages
✔ Often, our expectations are unrealistic

Facilitator's Questions
- "If family meals are a good thing, yet hard to do with young children, are there ways to make them work or achieve that family sense at other times?"

For professionals:
- "Do we contribute to unrealistic expectations? Can we help parents gain a better perspective?"

■ *Discipline and Self-Control—Theirs and Ours*

Notes

Key Messages

- ✔ It's natural for kids to test us
- ✔ Learning self-control is a developmental struggle
- ✔ All parents have to struggle with their own self-control
- ✔ Good discipline is having reasonable expectations, being consistent, fair, and keeping ourselves together
- ✔ Using time-outs allow children and parents time to get it together
- ✔ Explaining to kids what we expect of them and why we are angry and using time outs is easier on us and them—and more effective—than spanking

Facilitator's Questions

- "When are the hardest times for you to be consistent?"

- "How do you try to maintain your self-control when your children are driving you crazy?"

For professionals:

- "Were you surprised that these parents 'knew the right thing'? If poor discipline is not a matter of ignorance, how do we help?"

Likely Questions from the Group

- "What about spanking and physical discipline?"

Possible Response (see supplemental information)

- "Many of us sooner or later swat our children, jerk them around, or squeeze arms too hard. Some people believe that if you 'spare the rod' you spoil the child, and that means spanking to instill respect. Looking at research, this perspective is not supported:

  - Punishment itself, is the least effective means of discipline and spanking tends to be the least effective means of punishment. It instills fear rather than respect and doesn't teach anything except that power allows individuals to hurt each other.

  - Physical punishment can lead to abuse. Usually once you begin using it, the results are less and less effective, you use it more and more often, and spank harder and harder.

  - Physically punishing children usually makes parents feel bad, guilty, uneasy, or remorseful.

  - While there is a difference between a swat in anger (which is most common) and spanking as a 'wait until later' detached punishment, both tend to have the same problems mentioned above.

Notes

- The swat that a parent gives, such as when the toddler runs out in the street, is not particularly harmful if it is the *exception*. By being the exception—a rare event that communicates the parent's extraordinary panic, fear, and concern—the seriousness of the behavior is emphasized.

Whether to spank or not to spank is an age old issue bound up with culture, religion, and ideology. Perhaps the best way to interpret 'spare the rod—spoil the child' is to view the 'rod' as the staff of the shepherd, gently used to guide (not hit) their sheep. Whatever our practises, two things are clear: without ***guidance*** and direction, the child is indeed spoiled. When children are not treated with respect, and not helped to achieve self-control with gentle, loving care the relationship between parents and children suffer."

■ *Children Demand So Much—and We Don't Always See it Coming*

Key Messages

✔ It's not all kisses and hugs

✔ Illness can devastate a family

Facilitator's Questions

- "How has illness affected your family?"

- "What other kinds of crisis or demands have unexpectedly affected your family (e.g., unemployment, marital stress)?"

■ *It Isn't Easy Being Poor In a World Full of Stuff*

Key Messages

✔ The up-hill struggle low-income parents face is a real one and worthy of the respect and understanding of professionals and society at large.

✔ Low-income parents have a hard time maintaining their sense of self-worth in a material world.

Facilitator's Questions

- "What helps you cope with the feelings of regret, embarrassment, and disappointment expressed in the video?"

For professionals:

- "Do we recognize the pressure and pain that low-income families experience?"

Notes

■ ***Parents Lead Busy Lives***

Key Message

✔ Parents trying to provide the best for their children often have to go to extraordinary lengths to make it.

Facilitator's Questions

- "How do you survive those busy, hectic times? What coping strategies do you use?"

■ ***Parents Can't Make it Alone***

Key Message

✔ Families are a resource—parents, grandparents, and the extended family.

Facilitator's Questions

- "What role does the family play in your situation? Family advice and support are never perfect, so there are usually issues of asserting your own competence and independence. Are there ways you can get more support from your family? What gets in the way?"

- "If you don't have family to support you, who else could fill that gap?"

For professionals:

- "Are there ways that our support can build more off of family and extended family?"

■ ***Babies Don't Need THE Best, They Need OUR Best***

Key Messages

✔ You can do it, if you don't give up!
✔ Find the time.

Facilitator's Questions

- "What's the 'best' that you are giving your children?"

---

3. Wrapping up the Session

A. Summarize the key points that have come from participant's discussion

B. Discuss the next steps implied from the discussion, for individuals or the group

Notes

V Potential Problems in Discussion Groups

A discussion may never take off in the presence of a know-it-all, or people with strong definitive opinions. There may be someone who feels the need to assert what they KNOW is the right thing to do. Or, someone with a pressing need or traumatic experience that overshadows all discussion. Facilitator's should be prepared with strategies to deflect this sort of domination:

- "What you have said is very interesting (useful, provocative). What do others think?"
- "Your experience may help some of us make better choices, but I'm not sure we can address all the issues you raised here."
- "I'm not sure the issue is always that clear cut (spanking, budgeting money, etc.). Is there another perspective to consider or side issues that make the issue more complex?

VI Final Note

Best For My Baby lends itself to discussion and raising a number of questions about parenting. Neither the videotape nor the support materials provide definitive answers to questions. Parenting is a matter of cultural and personal beliefs, values and style. Families live in many different circumstances. Parents are faced with numerous hard choices, compromises and trade-offs.

Facilitators do not have to be experts on parenting. Their role is move the discussion along by raising issues, questions, and helping the audience struggle to develop perspective. By anticipating likely reactions, and being prepared with information and ideas, facilitators can use ***Best For My Baby*** as the centerpiece of a lively and productive session on the struggle to provide the best for all babies.

VII Supplemental Information

"Best For My Baby" Condensed Showing Guide

"Best For My Baby"—Quick Section Guide

Introduction (We All Want the Best for Our Baby)
Begin 0:00 End 1:51 Running time 1:51

Children Are Wonderful Learners (And They Can Be Very Annoying)
Begin 1:51 End 5:35 Running time 3:44

Doing The Right Thing, Or Trying To
Begin 5:35 End 7:13 Running time 1:38

Discipline and Self-Control—Theirs and Ours
Begin 7:13 End 12:49 Running time 5:36

Children Demand So Much—And We Don't Always See It Coming
Begin 12:49 End 17:23 Running time 4:34

It Ain't Easy Being Poor
Begin 17:23 End 22:33 Running time 5:10

Parents Lead Busy Lives
Begin 22:33 End 24:18 Running time 1:45

Parents Can't Make It Alone
Begin 24:18 End 27:37 Running time 3:19

Babies Don't Need the Best—They Need Our Best
Begin 27:37 End 30:00 Running time 2:23

Questions to Facilitate Discussion

General

- How did you feel when you were watching the video? Were these people that you could relate to?
- What's "the best" that you are giving your baby?

For professionals or general public:

- How did these parents square with our typical views of low-income parents? If we respect parent strengths, are there ways we can offer more support for parents?

Learning

- What do your kids do that shows their drive to learn (and might be annoying)?
- What could you do more of to promote their learning? (e.g. more of your time, interest, activities, praise?)

For professionals or general public:

- How can we work off the strong desires that parents have for their children to learn?

Guidance and Discipline

- When are the hardest times for you to be consistent?
- How do you try to maintain your self-control when your children are driving you crazy?

For professionals:

- Were you surprised that these parent "knew the right thing"? If poor discipline is not a matter of ignorance, how do we help?

Family Life in These Times Isn't Always Easy

- If family meals are a good thing, how do we do them? Or, achieve that family sense at other times? Do professionals contribute to unrealistic expectations?

Low-Income Living

- What helps you cope with the feelings of regret, embarassment, and disappointment expressed in the video?
- What role does the family play in your situation? Are there ways you can get more support from your family? What gets in the way?

Wrapping Up the Session

- Summarize the key points that have come from participant's discussion.
- Discuss the next steps implied from the discussion, for individuals or the group.

About Infants and Toddlers

■ *Five Things to Keep in Mind About Babies*

1. **Infants and toddlers are very competent, eager learners.** Babies need less "stimulation" and more respect for their learning. If we are concerned only with stimulating, with doing something *to* the baby, we ignore a vital requirement for learning and development: that babies need to discover that they can influence the people around them. Yes, they need stimulation, which they get from objects, and more importantly from people. But they need to perceive their own involvement in these stimulating experiences. When stimulation is provided on the adult's whim without paying attention to the baby's response, the baby is being treated as an object. Education results when in T. Barry Brazelton's words a baby finds "the pleasure of being the cause"—of learning how to act in order to produce the results he wants, of learning about things that are the results of his own actions. When adults respond to a child's language or gestures, or participates in her exploration of the space, the child develops a sense of power.

2. **Infants and toddlers are sensory-motor beings.** They explore the world with their senses and developing motor skills. Long before they understand a concept like "under" or "far" with their minds, their bodies are learning to move in and understand the up and down, over and under, physical world. Sensory exploration expands the world which once only had a few categories like—things to suck and not to suck—into a complex meaningful place of things with texture, color, sound, weight, uses and many other qualities.

3. **Infants and toddlers are communicators.** They begin with the birth cry and continually expand their range of signals and messages, both those they use and those they understand. Crying and gurgling rapidly becomes sophisticated sounds and gestures in the first year of life. They learn language by hearing language, lots of it in individual conversations.

4. **Infants and toddlers are social beings.** Babies' communication is directed at those they love and need, the adults who care for them, and soon, the other large and small people that they share the world with. It is the give and take of communication that connects babies to the world of people. But they are not quite yet social in the sense that older children are—able to participate in and benefit from group play experiences. Placed in group situations, they often have difficulty.

5. **Infants and toddlers are people with feelings.** They may not understand most language or the motives of others, but they are very sensitive to tones and feelings in spoken language and body language. They understand rejection, anger, empathy, praise, and appreciation.

■ *Expectations for Children Under Age Two*

Expect infants to:

1. Be different from each other. Each child will be different—in interests, in moods, in pace, in how they learn, and the care they need.
2. Cry to communicate. Crying is how a baby lets us know she needs our help.
3. Desperately need us. Being allowed to remain in distress IS NOT good for an infant. It works against the feelings of basic trust and security that provides the foundation of healthy development.

   When the world caves in on a toddler, for whatever reason, they often desperately need reassurance, whether stuck in a tantrum of rage or a pit of despair.
4. Explore. A constant curiosity fuels the process of learning about the world.
5. Test all limits. Testing the reactions of people and things to their actions is how babies learn the way the world behaves.
6. Experiment with their bodies. They use their growing physical powers to test the properties of people, things, and space. They NEED to crawl or run, kick, move things, and drop and throw things, climb in and over, if they are to learn.
7. Experiment with their senses. The mouth, eyes, ears, and skin are the tools baby's use to learn. They NEED to touch, taste, feel, look, and listen to the world. It is the mouth and the whole body that are the baby's chief tools. (e.g., sucking on everything, testing the feel of baby food or paint on the cheek or stomach).

© 1990 by Jim Greenman—Reprint for discussion and use with ***Best For My Baby***

■ *Additional Expectations for Toddlers*

In addition to the above, expect toddlers to:

8. Explode with energy. Their new skills and curiosity often leads to sheer exuberance and bursts of energy.
9. Explode with frustration. They can do so much and want so much now, frustration comes easily when are are blocked because internal controls and patience comes slowly.
10. Dawdle. Whether to "smell the roses", examine a curious object never noticed before, stubbornness, or have their own concept of time, toddlers often dawdle.
11. Be contrary. "No" is a declaration of independence. Toddlers refuse, defy, and resist because they are learning they can exert some control. It is the first step learning self-control.
12. Change personalities. So much change is happening for them, inside and out. It is natural for toddlers to swing from being sweet and compliant to little tyrants, from joy to rage, and from needy babies to seemingly mature helpers.
13. Act fearful. As they move into the world, and imagine the world, they discover the world has scary elements.
14. Act powerful. Toddlers begin to understand they can cause things to happen or not to happen, do things on their own, create things, go places, get strong positive and negative reactions from people.

■ *What Infants and Toddlers Need Most During the First Two Years of Life*

1. **A Sense of Basic Trust**
   The first year of life is when children need to acquire what Erik Erickson called "basic trust," a feeling of safety and security that the world and oneself is alright. Basic trust comes from responsive, predictable care from familiar others who one loves and is deeply attached to. Without this sense, the world is far too scary a place to cope with and learn about. Bruno Bettleheim suggested that security derives from the feeling that we can safely relax, that we need not worry. To "safely relax", an infant literally needs to feel "at home." In the words of a hypothetical baby: "This is my place. I know these people. They know me and they *like* me, despite my crying and diarrhea and difficulty going to sleep. I can count on them to take care of me, to respond to me. I can be *me* here with all my own quirks and still will be accepted. I will be safe here and I can step out and explore this strange and mysterious world." What makes a feeling of home is that sense of familiarity, acceptance, and safety.

2. **Opportunities with the World of Things and People**
   A baby needs a safe world where he is encouraged to explore, rewarded for learning through his own actions, and sustained against distraction or premature interferences in the exploration. A baby needs a world rich with opportunities to see, hear, feel, touch and move—to undertake all the actions listed above. The child needs a place where he will "feel the world at his fingertips, that is HIS to explore and enjoy." Movement is essential. Moving around gives babies different perspectives, vantage points, which they need to move from an entirely egocentric view of space and develop a more sophisticated sense of the relations between self and space and other people. We know that objects are the same regardless of the angle or the distance from which we observe them, or whether bathed by sunlight or blanketed by shadows, but an infant does not.

3. **A Sense of Autonomy**
   Autonomy is the sense of being a separate, independent self. Babies need to begin to feel: I'm a ME—a self separate from mom and dad and my caregivers. I can impact on this huge world. If I can say no freely, I can also say yes freely. I can use my powers so I can begin to control this body and these feelings.

4. **A Sense of Power and Competence**
   Only when children feel personally a sense of POWER—"I can make things happen"—and COMPETENCE—"I can do things and achieve things"—can they step out into the world as active learners and problem-solvers prepared to cope with what will come. Giving children choices, the freedom to move, the chance to try things, and the power to have us respond to their physical and emotional needs tells each baby she is SOMEONE. Giving them an opportunity to do things successfully—get unstuck from under a table, put on a coat, help sponge the counter—tell each baby he is CAPABLE.

© 1990 by Jim Greenman—Reprint for discussion and use with ***Best For My Baby***

Guiding Young Children's Behavior

A young child's job is to try to learn to behave in the mysterious world s/he is trying to make sense of. Young children are striving for understanding, independence, and self-control. A child learns by exploring, experimenting and testing the limits of their environment and experiencing the consequences of their behavior. In this way they come to understand how the world works and their own limits.

At our best, our guidance and discipline practises promote a sense of independence, autonomy, and self-esteem, while maintaining the control necessary for a safe and non-threatening environment. The basis of this control is to provide the best home within our powers—secure, orderly, and developmentally appropriate—a positive "yes" environment which allows children to experiment and test their behavior within clearly defined limits.

It is natural for very young children to poke, slap, even bite each other—especially if there is nothing more interesting to do. It is natural for babies to experiment with food and materials—dropping, tearing apart, smashing. It is natural for older children to also test things and each other.

Much of good discipline is planning based on:

- understanding and anticipating the child's difficult times (when they are tired, hungry, excited, etc.)
- setting clear limits and expectations that fit the child (they have to sit at the table, go to bed at 8:00, etc.)
- being consistent (not giving in when pushed)
- redirection and logical consequences when the child has difficulty
- NOT PUNISHMENT—the least effective way of changing behavior.

Our most important job as parents is to gently encourage and support self-control, to protect children and to help children learn how to behave reasonably by providing a good environment and modeling appropriate behavior. The best punishment as a consequence for inappropriate behavior is having the child experience the logical consequence of their action—the problem behavior is not allowed to succeed.

■ *Logical Consequences*

When a child behaves in an inappropriate manner, the most effective discipline is for the child to experience the specific logical consequences of his or her behavior. For example, if Kim can't play at the sink without splashing her brother, she can't play there and will be directed to other play.

This is more effective than generalized punishment, e.g., swatting or having to sit in a chair for a period of time. It is of course our job as parents to make sure the expectations placed on the child are reasonable and the context encourages the desired behavior—a "yes" environment with as few temptations as possible. We have to help the child meet the behavioral expectations. If the child refuses to expect the consequences of his actions and becomes defiant, he may need a "time-out."

■ *Time-Outs*

Ideally, a time-out is NOT punishment. Instead, a time-out is just what it sounds like—a neutral break, a period for the child to regain self-control. While usually a child will have to be forced to take a time-out, the ultimate goal is for the child to achieve the control to take the time-out by herself.

Time-outs are used when a child is losing control and refuses redirection, e.g., acting aggressively, throwing a tantrum, complete defiance. If a child has violated a rule without losing control or has regained control, he should experience the consequence of his behavior, not be forced into a time-out.

© 1990 by Jim Greenman—Reprint for discussion and use with ***Best For My Baby***

Time-Out Procedure

1. Child's repeated "no" or inappropriate behavior—e.g. Joey smacking his sister.
2. Parent—"You need a time-out." Place child in a time-out area (at the edge of the room or his/her bedroom), without applying any moral overtones.
3. Pay the minimum necessary attention for the child to remain in the time-out area regaining control. If you need to hold the child, try to do so in a neutral manner, neither warmly nor angrily.
4. When the child regains control—"Are you feeling o.k.? Are you ready to come and be with us?" If you left the time-out area, the child should be told to come to you when he feels o.k.
5. Help the child to express his/her feelings leading to the time-out by putting words to his emotions and behavior. "You got very angry when you couldn't have that truck, didn't you? You really wanted that truck."
6. Give the child the physical nurturing he needs.
7. Explain your position. "I know how upset you were, but I won't let you hurt people and I won't let people hurt you. Next time, if you get really angry you can take a time-out and I'll spend some time with you."
8. If the child regained control quickly, praise him for it.

After the Time-Out

1. Adjust the environment to avoid the situation the child has trouble with.
2. Praise the child for every instance of self-control.
3. Try to catch situations before the child loses all control and encourage the child to take his own time-out.

■ *Summary—Good Discipline and Guidance*

Our job as parents is to:

1. Keep the children interested.
2. Try to resolve incidents calmly and patiently as they happen.
3. Respect the child as a special individual who even at his/her worst is not a "little criminal" but a little boy or girl struggling to achieve self-control and balance real needs with the demands of the world. It is not appropriate or fair to characterize children as bad, mean, nasty, or other terms we may apply to adults.

When a young child is hurting another child or being destructive:

Do:

1. Tell the child to stop in a firm but friendly voice—personally, not from across the room if at all possible.
2. State and model the acceptable behavior—"Use words with John, ask him if you can have a turn"—telling them what they can do right as well as what they are doing wrong.
3. Redirect to a new activity if necessary.
4. Offer the child reasonable choices.
5. Always recognize the child's feeling of anger, confusion, or hurt.
6. Take a time-out ourselves or seek help if we are too angry to handle the situation.
7. Apologize to the child if we lose control over our anger.

Do Not:

1. Shame or humiliate the child.
2. Shake, jerk, squeeze or physically indicate our disapproval.
3. Say "bad" girl or boy or otherwise imply that the child is the problem, instead of the behavior.
4. Moralize or let too much of our anger come through.
5. Use "no" too often. Use the positive—"hold on to the cup" and other words like "stop" or "please don't" instead of "no."
6. Use bribes, false threats, or false choices.
7. Use food as reinforcers.

Always:

1. Make clear that it is the child's behavior and not the child that is unacceptable.
2. Help the child with appropriate language to understand the problems with his or her behavior. Use redirection, logical consequences, or time-outs depending on the age of the child, the misbehavior, and the child's state.

© 1990 by Jim Greenman—Reprint for discussion and use with ***Best For My Baby***

Working With Parents—Thoughts for Professionals

When working with parents, it helps to periodically question the assumptions that underlie what we do. There is an inevitable fine line between support and control, between providing needed advice and arrogantly bringing wisdom to the unenlightened. Is our advice and support based on the assumption that the parents we work with are uninformed? Undisciplined and impulse driven? Unmotivated or uncaring? Do we assume they need support? Affirmation?

How are they different from us? Are they different from us? Is the problem that they have less resources or more stress? Are we the bearers of truth and knowledge?

Are we the guardians and watch dogs of public funds—the strings that go with subsidy? How do we appear to the parents that we work with?

The key to working successfully with all parents is to always:

- Maintain an absolute sense of respect for the parent as a human being.
- Try to suspend judgement and understand their perspective.
- Keep in mind that none of us are perfect parents. We all struggle.

■ *Some Things to Keep in Mind*

1. **All Parents are Different**
   Every parent wants the best for their child. And most want the same things for their children: success in school and life, social success, and self-esteem. But parents have different beliefs and values and their feelings about the means to these ends often are different. Cultural differences are real and what is often proposed as "good child development" is culture bound.

2. **Respect Parent Boundaries**
   Parents my want very different relationships with educators, child care staff, and other helping professionals. Some may want a lot of contact and share much of what is going on in their lives. Others may maintain a distance and share far less information and contact. Parents have a right to set the boundaries.

3. **Be Non-Judgemental**
   None of us are perfect parents. We all have different failings and make different compromises balancing the real world of children, work, school, and family life. It is critical that interactions with parents and your conversations with other professionals (and certainly other parents) reflect an empathetic or neutral attitude toward parents. It is not our job to evaluate parents and the choices that they make.

4. **Competition for the Love of the Child is Destructive**
   It is often hard for professionals who work with children not to compete with parents for the affection of the child. Teachers and child care workers naturally take pleasure in the child's attachment, and often the parents want the child to be attached. But parents need to know that the people who care for their children understand that the parent-child attachment is critical. Parents are the most important people in their child's life, and the professional's feelings toward the child will always supplement, not supplant, the bonds they have. Parents know this by the communications they have with professionals (verbal and non-verbal) that focuses in on your respect for and appreciation of their efforts and the child's bond with them and doesn't overemphasize the child's bond with you.

© 1990 by Jim Greenman—Reprint for discussion and use with ***Best For My Baby***